Educators Experiences Navigating Generative AI in Writing Instruction

Dr. Mary Ott, York University

Mercedes Veselka, York University

Abstract

This qualitative, interview-based study explored how educators are working with, against, and around generative AI in their practice as writing instructors. These educators are making adaptations to their pedagogical practices as they navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by generative AI. However, they are also asking ethical and philosophical questions about how generative AI will shape and reshape the future of writing and their educational contexts. This study sought to understand how these ethical questions, values, and contexts impacted educators and opened up space for (re)imaging pedagogical practice.

Background

How are educators and other professionals who support writers adapting their pedagogies to work with, around, or against generative AIs? This question guided a qualitative research study interviewing educators (n=39) about their ethical questions and experiences with generative artificial intelligence (genAI) connected to their identity as writers and teachers of writing. While previous research broadly considers educator perspectives and experiences of genAI in education (Kim & Kim, 2022; Cardon et al., 2023; Nazaretsky et al., 2022; Chan, 2023), there is little empirical research considering the roles, identities and labour generative AI asks of educators. This study fills this important gap and considers educator agency, policy landscape, and how they navigate ethical questions and concerns.

Objectives and Research Question

The objective of this study was to explore how educators were working with, around, or against AI to gain a deeper understanding of the development of writing processes and how educators perceive the ethical implications of using genAI in their work with writers. We explored the following open-ended questions:

1) What does it mean to be a writer now?
2) What new strategies might writers need to develop?
3) What pedagogical changes are required?
4) What are the challenges and opportunities for writing skills development?
5) What are the ethical implications of using generative AI in writing?

Methods

For this qualitative study, we interviewed 39 educators across a range of contexts including high school educators, adult language and literacy educators, college and university instructors, writing tutors and teacher educators. Participants were recruited and interviewed for approximately one hour. These interviews occurred over the course of five months from January 2024 to May 2024. This study drew methodologically from constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). As an emergent research methodology, constructivist grounded theory gives space for exploration and focuses on building theory grounded in the data. This informed our process of recruitment and analysis which were shaped by our own sociological orientations to writing instruction. Dr. Mary Ott is a professor of curriculum studies focused on language and literacy. Mercedes Veselka is an English language teacher and graduate student studying language and literacy education. Analysis was ongoing as the researchers met weekly to discuss, refine, and explore the patterns in the data.

Findings

There were a number of key findings which are listed below.

- Educators face diverse educational and policy landscapes which constrain their choices. Despite the time-saving elements of generative AI, they are also being asked to do more labour and take on new roles as detectives. This is a role many educators resist, finding ways to enact their values outside of this expectation.
- Educators are not just asking questions about how to practically integrate this new technology into their practice. AI is causing them to question what it means to be a writer and what they believe is important to know about writing. In response to this finding, we are developing a framework to help language educators situate their practice in different contexts and consider their values and goals of writing instruction. This may help them discern when AI can be used as a coach, when AI can be used as a collaborator, and when it is important for learners to engage in writing as a thinking process.
- Multilingual educators in particular noticed the way multilingual writers often feel they need to 'hide' themselves when learning to write in English. They met those challenges by finding pedagogical practices to focus on their learners' voices. This has caused shifts in the ways they think about writing as a process, assessment practices, and the need for deeper points of connection in the day-to-day.

Conclusions and Implications

These educators' experiences with genAI point to the impact this technology is having as they reimagine writing instruction in the age of AI. This technology is not only reshaping the pedagogical practices of educators, but causing them to ask questions about what writing means for them, for their communities and for their wider world. This work points to the need to

prioritize these deeper questions in both our research and practice to ensure language educators have the resources they need to make principled adaptations in alignment with their contexts, learners, and values.

Questions?

For additional information about the project please contact the principal investigator Dr. Mary Ott at mott@yorku.ca.

References

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